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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a clinical survey administered to 1,007 high school students in central Indiana. The survey consisted of 77 questions designed to elicit information covering the total life experiences of the high school student. The areas that were extensively studied are (1) demographic information such as sex, age, family membership; (2) perception of parent, intra-family communication, family interaction, habits and attitudes; (3) attitudes toward school, education, and the "Establishment"; (4) attitudes toward drugs, smoking, drinking, and established patterns of use; (5) self-concept, fears, hopes, and learned ways of dealing with tension. (Author)

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The High School Student:
a Personality Profile

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A semi-structured clinical survey was administered to 1,007 high school students in central Indiana. The schools sampled are representative of schools in industrial midwestern towns. They can be characterized as public, private, university affiliated, and church supported schools. The survey was administered in groups and on a voluntary basis.

The survey consisted of 77 questions designed to gain as much information about the high school student as possible. The areas intensively studied were: (1) demographic characteristics of students; (2) perception of parents and family interaction; (3) attitudes towards school, education, and the establishment; (4) attitudes towards drugs and established patterns of use; and (5) self concept, hopes, fears and learned ways of dealing with tension.

The literature is replete with studies describing the high school drug user, the underachiever, the delinquent, the drop-out, and the like, but no studies were found that attempt to clinically evaluate the high school student, his needs, his dynamics, and his characteristics. What is the average high school student like?

This report will briefly summarize the results of the survey of 1,007 high school students enrolled in high schools in midwestern America. 53.6% of the sample were males and 45.5% females. The age and grade breakdown are as follows: 26.5% were 14-15 years old, 32.5% were 16 years old, 26.4% were 17, 11.1% were 18, and 1% was 19 or older. 18.4% were in the 9th grade, 34.5% in the 10th, 30% in the 11th, and 17% were seniors. Among these students, 27.9% were the youngest members of their families, and 26.0% were the eldest.

41.8% were middle children, and 3.1% were only children. Table 1 presents the sex, age, grade and position in the family.

TABLE 1

Sex, age, grade, and family membership breakdown of the sample

Variable	Percentage	N = 1007
Sex		
Male	53.6	
Female	45.5	
Age		
15 or younger	26.5	
16	32.5	
17	26.4	
18	11.1	
19 or older	1.0	
Grade		
9th	18.4	
10th	34.5	
11th	30.0	
12th	17.0	
Family Membership		
Youngest children	27.4	
Eldest children	26.0	
Middle children	41.8	
Only children	3.1	

How Does the High School Student Describe His Family? Table 2 presents parents' employment, marital situation and living arrangements.

TABLE 2

Mother's employment, father's employment, marital status and living arrangements.

Variable	Percentage	N = 1007
Mother -		
employed full time	30.2	
full-time housewife	45.8	
Father -		
employed full time	83.3	
unemployed	2.6	
retired	6.1	
Living with both parents	83.3	
with one natural parent	9.7	
Parents divorced, separated	9.4	

In describing their families, this sample indicated that approximately 30.2% of the mothers were engaged in full-time employment, and 45.8% were full-time housewives. It is interesting to note that 88.4% of the fathers were employed full-time, 2.6% were unemployed, and 6.1% retired. 83.3% of this sample's parents lived together, 9.4% were divorced or separated, and approximately 9.7% of the sample high school population were living with one natural parent. Table 3 details the students' attitudes toward their parents.

TABLE 3

Identification and communication of the student with his parents

Variable	Percentage	N = 1007
Close identification with parents	52.2	
Close identification with brothers and sisters	11.7	
No identification with parents or family	27.5	
Communication with parents		
Open and honest	51.7	
Open and honest only on certain issues	19.7	
Parents deceived them	1.6	
Parents avoid talking	11.3	
Students do not listen to parents	5.0	

52.2% of this sample felt that they were like their parents, strongly resembled them and could identify with them. 11.7% felt that they were more like their brothers and sisters, and approximately 27.5% felt that they were not like their parents and did not identify or actually take their parents as models. When answering the question concerning the degree of openness and honesty of communication between parent and child, 51.7% indicated that their parents had honestly leveled and communicated with them, 19.7% felt that their parents leveled with them only about certain issues, 1.6% indicated that their parents have actually deceived them, 11.3% stated that their parents avoid talking to them about certain things, and 5% stated that they do not listen to what their parents have to say.

Table 4 presents the data describing the father's, mother's and offspring's drinking, smoking and pill-taking patterns.

TABLE 4

Drinking, smoking and pill-taking patterns of fathers, mothers and students

Variable N = 1007	Father	Mother	Student
Drinking			
Heavy drinkers	4.8	1.1	3.3
Every day	9.8	4.6	
Once/twice per week	55.2	49.4	47.0
Never	27.7	43.1	
Drink	69.8	55.1	60.0
Smoking			
Great deal	23.2	15.5	16.8
Do not smoke	32.7	53.0	
Stopped smoking	13.9	3.7	
Pills (Tranqulizers, aspirin, sleeping pills, etc.)			
Only when needed	44.8	51.0	
Many, every day	5.3	9.7	
No pills	29.4	18.4	
Drugs			
Experimented			23.0

When describing the father's drinking, smoking, and "pill"-taking habits this high school sample indicated the following: 4.8% felt that their fathers drank a great deal, 9.8% of the fathers drank every day, 55.2% of the fathers drank once or twice a week, and 27.7% reported that their fathers never

drank. The fathers' smoking habits were described as follows: 23.2% felt that their father smoked a great deal, 32.7% did not smoke at all, and 13.9% of the fathers had stopped smoking. "Pills" in this survey specifically refer to tranquilizers, aspirins, sleeping pills and the like. 44.8% of this sample stated that their fathers took pills only when needed, 5.3% felt that their fathers took too many pills, and 29.4% described their fathers as taking no pills at all.

The mothers' drinking, smoking, and pill-taking habits are as follows: 1.1% of the mothers were described as heavy drinkers, and 4.6% as drinking every day. 49.4% of the mothers drank moderately, and 43.1% never drank. When describing the mothers' smoking habits, this sample indicated that 53.0% of the mothers did not smoke at all, 3.7% had quit smoking, and 15.5% smoked a great deal. 51.0% of the mothers took pills only when needed, 9.7% took pills very often or every day, and only 18.4% did not take any pills at all.

Family cohesiveness and closeness of interaction were indirectly assessed by the following question: If I have had a "bad trip," I would probably go to see my: (a) mother, (b) father, (c) brother/sister, (d) friend, etc. Only 9.7% of the students indicated that they would go to their parents and family in event of a "bad trip," and only 1.6% would seek information about drugs from the home.

School, Education and the Establishment.

The third area investigated by this survey is attitudes and feelings toward school, education and the establishment.

TABLE 5

Attitudes toward school, education and the 'Establishment"

Variable	Percentage	N = 1007
School		
Intersting and relevant	53.5	
Boring, not relevant	16.0	
O.K.	30.0	
Enjoy learning	15.1	
Enjoy non-academic aspects	21.8	
Enjoy the social life	16.9	
Enjoy nothing in school	3.4	
Participation in school activities		
None	36.3	
One school activity	15.2	
Few school activities	37.2	
Many school activities	9.0	
The Establishment is		
Oppressive (strong negative feelings)	21.1	
O.K.	32.6	
Necessary	33.0	

53.3% of the sample felt that school was interesting, relevant, and expressed a positive feeling toward school. 16.0% perceived school as an experience which is boring, a waste of time and not relevant to life, and approximately 30.0% indicated that school was just O.K. Yet, 94.0% stated that they will remain in school and graduate, and 6% definitely stated that they will leave school, be expelled, drop out and in effect, did not expect to graduate. 15.1% of the students enjoyed the learning and academic aspects of school, 21.8% liked the non-academic aspects of school, and 16.9% liked the social life afforded in the school. Only 3.4% indicated that there

was absolutely nothing in the school experience that appealed to them.

In describing the difficulty of subject matter taught, 10.0% found English, reading, literature, and writing to be difficult. Mathematics, as the most difficult subject in the school curriculum was checked by 21.4%. 9% felt history was the most difficult subject and 7.7% indicated that science was the most difficult subject in school. It is interesting to note that 37.5% of the total sample indicated that all subject matter taught at the school was difficult for them. 13.3% of the sample described themselves as "A" students. Approximately 42% were "B" students, 35% were "C" students, 3% were "D" students, and 5.2% did not know and refused to commit themselves to the type of student they felt they were. 7.5% of the students indicated that they seem to get in trouble in school all the time or very often, 44.8% rarely get in trouble in school, 24.5% never get in trouble in school, and 22.0% felt that sometimes they found themselves in trouble in school. The survey also attempted to evaluate the degree of student involvement in activities and organizations sponsored by the school system. 36.3% did not belong to any organization and did not participate in any club function or activities, 15.2% belonged to one club, 9.0% belonged to many and 37.2% belonged to a few of the school sponsored clubs and extra-curricular organizations.

In evaluating the Establishment, 21.1% of the students expressed very negative and hostile feelings toward the Establishment such as it being very oppressive and representing nothing they believed in. 32.6% felt that the Establishment was O.K., and 33.0% indicated the need and necessity for "the Establishment." It would appear that the schools are also not meeting the

needs of these students. Approximately 37.5% find all school subjects difficult and only 15.1% of the total population are actually enjoying the learning experience. 55% have experienced either very marginal success or no success at all in the school. 36.3% of the student body do not belong to a single club or organization sponsored by the school system. These are the ones who experience the school life in a minimal and non-belonging manner, and 16.0% could see no relevance or meaning to the whole school situation. When we consider the number of hours and days the average student spends in school and what little gratification he is gaining from it, we then should not wonder about the low rate of school achievement, the high rate of drop out, and the attitudes which are expressed verbally and otherwise about our schools.

The Drinking, Smoking and Pill Taking Habits of the High School Student

Twelve questions were included in the survey to gain information from the high school students about their smoking, drinking, and drug taking habits. 49.5% of the sample do not smoke at all, approximately 13% have stopped smoking or want to stop, 16.8% smoke either very heavily or one pack a day, and 17.3% smoke just a few cigarettes. Again 35.8% of the students do not drink any alcoholic beverages at all, 12.7% drink only with their parents, and 48.4% drink with friends at parties, alone, and at home. 3.3% described themselves as heavy drinkers, 47.1% drank occasionally, and 7.5% drank once or twice a week.

When describing their experiences with "drugs," 75.8% of the sample stated that they have not tried any "drugs." 4.5% tried pills from the

medicine cabinet at home, and approximately 23.0% have experimented with barbituates, marijuana, and a combination of drugs. 33.4% indicated that drugs were available and easy to get hold of, 12.0% felt that it would be rather difficult for them to obtain drugs, and 53.5% stated that they have never tried to obtain any drugs. 72.6% expressed the idea that one should avoid experimenting with drugs, and 32.0% of these felt that drugs should not be played around with because of the effect they might have. Approximately 10.0% believed that the drugs they are taking will in no way hurt or harm their bodies or minds. 5.7% felt that drugs will damage body and brain, 48.8% did not know what effect the drugs have on their body and mind. 5% indicated that the drugs helped them, and 2.6% knew that their drugs hurt them but they did not care. 13.2% were introduced to drugs by friends or acquaintances, 2.2% by members of their family, 3.0% by boy or girl friend, and 8.0% claim no influence in trying and taking drugs. 5.5% describe the effect and reaction from drugs as being exciting and wonderful. 2.0% claim to have had terrible experiences with drugs, 3.0% state that some trips are good and some bad, and 3.0% state that drugs have no effect on them. 16.0% wanted to know more about drugs from school personnel such as teachers, counselors, etc. 26.0% felt that professionals such as psychologists would be a better source of information about drugs, and 10.0% sought information from books and magazines while 6.0% preferred friends as sources of information about drugs. Only 1.6% would go to parents for this type of information.

The drinking, smoking and pill taking habits of this teen age group are highly similar to that of the parents, previously described in this study.

16.8% of these young people smoke one or more packs per day. 60% of them drink; of these, 47% drink occasionally and 3.3% are already heavy drinkers. 13% have experimented with drugs such as barbituates, marijuana, and the like, and 48.8% of this sample indicated their ignorance about the effects of drugs.

The Self Concept of the High School Student.

The last area studied by the survey concerns inner feelings of competence, anger, love, feelings about one's future and life in general, worries, fears, loneliness, alienation and the like. 27 questions were specifically designed to gain insight into how the high school student actually felt about himself and his place in this society.

45.6% of the sample held no job or were not employed at all, 8.3% worked 31 or more hours per week, 18.4% worked between 10 and 30 hours per week, 12% worked 5 to 10 hours per week, and 9.3% worked only when needed. Free time was spent in the following manner: 47.1% enjoying oneself, having fun, goofing off in social type activities with friends and people; 13.3% spent their free time in sport-type activities; 11.7% primarily on hobbies and projects; 10.6% doing nothing; 3.3% helping at home or in church; and 9.8% working and studying.

Only 25.5% had hobbies that they enjoyed such as collecting stamps, art, building things, and the like. About 7.4% of the sample had no hobbies, 21.4% chose sports as hobbies, and 40% indicated social-type and group activities as their hobbies.

The dating habits of this sample were also evaluated. 13.3% stated that

they dated a lot, 29.6% dated regularly, 34.1% did not date regularly or very often, 17.3% did not date at all, and 5.6% were not interested in dating. When asked as to how many friends the students had, 77% stated that they had many friends, 1% had no friends, 20.2% had few friends, and about 1% indicated that they did not need friends.

The worries, fears, and frustrations of the age group are also very revealing. 41% indicated that they worried most about feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-confidence, failure and generally not measuring up. Their worries centered around their future - their place in this world and their abilities to cope. This worry was about self-worth, being accepted, liked and their interpersonal relations. 2.6% indicated that their primary source of worry is family tensions and problems and 9.2% expressed basic concern for war, peace, pollution, and general environmental tensions, pressures and problems. 33% of this sample seemed to be worried about a great many things, and they seemed overwhelmed by their inability to deal with life and the different problems it was presenting to them. 7.7% stated that they had no real problems and worries, nothing that they could not deal and cope with.

It is interesting to note that the response patterns describing the high school students' worries is very similar to that describing their primary sources of fear. Here again approximately 43.8% indicated that their primary fears are of failure in life, in school, not being able to measure up or cope, and not being able to find a job. They did not feel either prepared or capable of facing what was ahead of them. This poverty of inner resources, lack of self-confidence, feelings of inadequacy in such a young group is

highly pronounced. 20.4% expressed concern for this country, the war, crime, violence, pollution, and the like. It is interesting to note that 7.6% specified fears of physical harm, pain, ill health, injury and even death as their primary fear.

How did this group of students perceive ("see") the future? 26.7% felt that they have a very good future to look forward to, 41.8% indicated that their future looked good and about 28% were rather dubious and uncertain about their future. In the survey was another open-end question which stated "five years from now I will _____." To this question 18.4% stated that the future was really much too uncertain to be predictable, with the implication that even planning would not pay off because no one can really count on the future. 24.6% indicated that they would be working and earning a living. 31.3% felt that they would be in college continuing their education, 29.8% stated that 5 years from now they would most probably be married, raising a family, working and maybe going to school, and 3.2% expected to be drafted.

In describing life in general, approximately 8.2% felt that life is meaningless, depressing, bad, and almost unbearable. 22.2% felt that life was exciting, 26.3% described life as being wonderful, and to 38.3% life was O.K.

When asked about their feelings of frustration, anger, and how they coped with such feelings, only 3.8% stated that they directed their feelings of anger and hostility directly at the cause or source of frustration. Approximately 1.2% stated that they would do something desperate and turn the anger and desperation inward; for example, they would take drugs, drive very fast, commit suicide, drink and the like. 34.1% preferred to express

anger in a passive manner, thus internalizing and quietly suffering. This group tended to withdraw, feel depressed, cry, and sulk when angered. While 33.1% expressed anger by fighting, shouting, getting mad, swearing and thus venting their feelings of anger in general against the environment, it should be noted that this acting out when frustrated and angered was not directed at the source of frustration but at whomever was about. Approximately 12% felt that they should suppress all expressions of anger and hostility. Their feelings should be controlled and held in, and 7.3% would directly use a scapo-goat, and take it out on someone who is not likely to fight back. It would appear that this age group has a great deal of difficulty handling strong feelings and expressing them in an adaptive manner in such a way as to reduce tension and solve dilemmas. The greater majority act out, feel frustrated, inadequate or express the hostility in a way that most assuredly creates more problems for them to cope with.

Approximately 5% stated that they felt blue and depressed very often, 13.3% felt depressed quite often, 56% experienced depressive feelings occasionally, 23% rarely felt blue, and about 2% denied ever feeling depressed.

When asked to rate themselves on a 5 point scale of certain behavioral characteristics, 2.6% rated themselves as sickly, 11.5% dependent, 13.1% lazy, 7.4% quarrelsome, 15% rebellious, 11.3% tired, 27.8% restless, 16% were followers, 21% were unpopular, and 21.2% felt they were loners. On the positive side of the picture 34.6% rated themselves as healthy, 55.6% felt they were independent, 48.7% were industrious, 65.8% were friendly, 55.6% described themselves as cooperative, 41.3% felt they were leaders, 36.7% described themselves as being popular, and 44% were outgoing.

In summary, the general picture the high school student describes of himself, his potential and capabilities and his coping mechanisms is rather pessimistic. It is quite evident that a large proportion of the high school population is having difficulty finding strength, support and acceptance in this world of ours. They do not feel they can identify with the significant people in their lives. The Establishment is either necessary or oppressive. Their educational experiences are not gratifying and they do not feel capable or ready to face a future that they feel is uncertain, unpredictable, and in no way promising. Their tension reduction mechanisms are inadequate and seem to lead to dilemmas, difficulties, and uncertainties.

A large proportion of this sample lack inner resources, strength, and a sense of identity. They prefer to be lost in a crowd where behavior is aimless and conformity high. The experiences of powerlessness, loneliness and alienation are overwhelming in such a young group.